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A PAPER

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A CO-OPERATIVE LANDOWNING SOCIETY.

INTRODUCTION.

The Office Committee at its meeting on December 18th, 1903 (as the result of an interview with Dr. Paton, of Nottingham, who for many years has been an earnest advocate of co-operation in connection with small holders and cultivators of land), decided to recommend Sectional and District Conferences to discuss the desirability of forming a "Co-operative Landowning Society," for the purpose of obtaining land to be worked by small holders and cultivators under a system of co-operative organisation, and by this means not only help in the solution of the great problem of retaining our workers on the land and so prevent the overcrowding of towns, but also find a safe outlet for the surplus capital of the movement to be used in promoting and extending co-operative effort.

In discussing an important matter of this kind, it is necessary to bring forward some proof of the practicability of the scheme. Co-operators have the right to know something about the prospects of success before risking anything in such an enterprise. With the object of obtaining information of a reliable character in regard to the chances of success, the Office Committee invited Mr. R. Winfrey, a gentleman who has devoted many

years of voluntary work to the practical solution of the subject, to give them the results of his efforts and to show how far the plan of letting land to "small holders" is practical and safe from a business point of view.

Mr. Winfrey's experience is given in the following paper, which the Office Committee request the Sections and Districts to have discussed at their conferences before Congress. If the discussions are favourable, it is probable that a proposal will be made to form a "Co-operative Landowning Society," to raise capital for the purchase of land to be let to small holders and cultivators who would be willing to adopt co-operative conditions.

J. C. G.



SMALL HOLDINGS.

I AM asked to contribute a short, practical paper in support of the proposal that co-operators should take up an active propaganda in favour of Small Holdings. I willingly do so, because I am convinced that if the co-operative societies throughout the country would invest their surplus capital in good and suitable agricultural land, and let it in "small holdings" to the agricultural populations of the district in which the land is situated, they would not only find a sound and profitable outlet for such capital, but they would confer on the rural population a great blessing, by bringing about:

1. The principle of land nationalisation in a practical form; and

2. The retaining of the best of our "sons of the soil" as cultivators and producers of food, leading up, step by step, to a more perfect system of co-operation between producer, distributor, and consumer.

There is nothing to fear. This can be done on business lines, and be made to pay, as I can show from my own experience.

I take it for granted that co-operative societies are favourable to the small holding movement. I need not, therefore, repeat at length the report I gave before the Congress of the International Co-operative Alliance, at Manchester, in July, 1902, of our fifteen years' experience in this direction in the fens of Lincolnshire, and more recently in Norfolk. I will come to the point at once.

How are co-operative societies to make a practical start?

By following the example of the South Lincolnshire and Norfolk Small Holdings Associations and the example of the Holland (Lines) and Norfolk County Councils.

Appoint a small committee of practical men, and instruct them to take the necessary steps to secure expert

advice, and then to purchase *suitable* land in the open market in *suitable* districts.

What I mean by "suitable" land is land fairly accessible to the men who are to cultivate it, and the sort of land that can be cultivated in all seasons without excessive horse labour—kind and good land that will be quickly responsive to good husbandry. I need hardly say that I do not advocate low-priced land. Land at £40 and £50 an acre is often cheaper than land at £20, and proves a better investment.

What I mean by "suitable" districts are districts where the population is not too sparse, but where there would be a healthy competition among the agricultural people to become small holders. To be a success my advice is:—Get down in a good agricultural district, get some of the fair-average land of that district, and draw your tenants from the men who have been born and brought up on the land, and who know what the land is capable of and how to treat it in all our varying seasons.

The demand for small holdings is greater in the best agricultural districts; labourers there can earn better wages and have more spirit; the more enterprising of them are on the look-out for opportunities to use their savings and improve their position. And experience proves that the demand for small holdings grows by what it feeds upon.

SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE.

Let me deal with South Lincolnshire first, and say, in passing, that I know of no district where Co-operative Societies could buy more suitable land to start their experiment. From 1887 to 1894, I worked hard in that district to get the agricultural labourers allotments, and over that period we succeeded in securing 1,600 acres of land, mostly in one-acre lots, for allotment purposes.

The labourers soon out-grew the one-acre plots, and, as chairman of the small holdings committee of the Holland (Lines.) County Council, it became my duty to pilot through a scheme for the purchase of three farms in three different districts. The following schedule sets forth the transactions:—

Date of Purchase.	Parish.	Extent.	Cost (exclusive of Cost of Registration of Title).	How Money Borrowed.	Yearly Repayment.	Annual Rents for Small Holdings, including Principal of Principal and Interest.	Balances for Taxes, Repairs, Tithe and Management after Deduction of Principal and Interest.	
							£	s. d.
1884	Frieston	48 acres	£ 2,638	£6,500, at 3½ per cent. of Public Works Loan Commissioners, to be repaid by equal yearly instalments of principal and interest.	£ 275 5 0	£ 303 26 15 0	£	s. d.
1894	Spalding	38 acres, farmhouses and buildings.	3,750					
Totals	Tydd	46½ acres	2,532		107 12 0	130 22 8 0		
1897		182½ acres	£8,920		£382 17 0	£433 49 3 0		

It will thus be seen that if the seventy tenants who occupy these three farms go on for fifty years paying the present rental (which is the fair average rent of the district) the county will then possess 182½ acres of land, and a rent roll of £433 a year, without it having cost the county ratepayers *one farthing*.

The Clerk to the County Council, who personally collects the rents, has recently informed me that during the ten years, out of a total rent paid amounting to £4,330, less than £10 have been lost, and that during the last five years not a single penny of rent has been lost, nor have any of the tenants been behind in their payments.

What better investment could anyone wish for than that? And I venture to state that if that land were put into the open market to-day it would average £5. 10s. an acre more than the County Council gave for it.

Of course, these 182½ acres have only partially met the demand in the close proximity to these three farms. In the Spalding district, where one of the farms is situated, we formed, some years ago, the South Lincolnshire Small Holdings Association, and we now have leased of Lord Carrington for twenty-one years (the seven years' lease having expired) a total of 650 acres, at a rental of £1,018. The growth of the movement may thus be tabulated.

Year.	Acres, &c., acres.	How allotted.
1886	Part of a field..... 10	road plots.
1892	Single field..... 35	half-acre and acre lots.
1893	"..... 35	1-acre lots.
1895	Farm..... 217	1 to 35-acre holdings.
1898	Single field..... 32	1-acre lots.
1899	Two separate fields.. 56	1 to 6-acre lots.
1904	Whole farm..... 265	2 to 40-acre holdings.

Total..... 650 acres.

Total number of tenants..... 202.

Mr. J. H. Diggle, of Moulton, near Spalding, acts as our steward and surveyor, and I have his report and balance sheet before me for the year ending December, 1903.

The gross rental from the 202 tenants is £1,323, out of which the Association pay rates, drainage, road repairs, steward's fee, tenants' annual supper, and then, after paying Earl Carrington his rent, have a small sum left for contingencies. The unpaid rents due amount to £6. 6s. only.

In connection with this Association we now have a credit bank for the tenants, of which I am treasurer, and the deposits in my hands at this moment amount to £230.

THE NORFOLK EXPERIMENT.

Now let me pass to Norfolk where the experiment is being tried on much lighter land, and land of half the capital value of that in South Lincolnshire.

In Norfolk we formed a Small Holdings Association in the year 1900, with a subscribed capital of £1,750, and purchased three farms, the particulars of which are set forth in the accompanying schedule:—

SCHEDULE 2.

PARISH.	EXTENT.	Cost, inclusive of enfranchisement, conveyance, and adapting to small holdings.	No. OF TENANTS.	Net. Rent, after deducting Tithes and Land Tax.
Purchased in 1900.	Swaffham.... 131 acres. Farmhouse, 2 cottages, new barns, & piggeries.	£3,407	32	£170
	Watton... .. 110 acres. Farmhouse, buildings, and three cottages.	£2,953	10	£130
	Whissonsett.. 97 acres. Farmhouse and buildings.	£2,240	18	£110
Totals.... 338 acres.		£8,600	60	£410

It will thus be seen that the three farms averaged a cost of £25 an acre, and that the net rental is equal to $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent on the entire cost. The only other annual charges are for repairs and steward's salary.

The 60 tenants have now had three seasons on these farms, one exceptionally dry and one exceptionally wet. The rents have been promptly paid and there is every evidence that this Norfolk experiment is going to succeed, although the land is not so good and productive as the land of South Lincolnshire.

NORFOLK COUNTY EXPERIMENT.

Two years ago I privately purchased 50 acres of fen land at Nordelph in the parish of Upwell, on the borders of Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, in response to an application I had from a body of labourers who had one-acre allotments, but who desired to increase their holdings. I gave £2,000 for this land and let it "like ripe cherries" in small holdings for £100 a year. Indeed, so great was the demand, and so limited the supply, that the night I went down to let it out the village clubroom was crowded with 70 or 80 labourers, and 50 acres was like one small loaf amongst a hungry crowd. I was only able to satisfy the few who lived nearest the land, the majority of those present I had to send empty away.

But not quite so as it turned out. I advised them to petition the County Council to put into operation the Small Holdings Act. The petition was drawn up and signed then and there. The County Council appointed a committee to hold an inquiry which I attended and voiced the wishes of the men. The committee reported favourably to the County Council who agreed to take action. Luckily a useful farm close to the village quickly came into the market, it was purchased by the County Council and the men got possession of it this coming Michaelmas.

The farm is ninety-two acres in extent, with excellent house and buildings, and cost £4,100 *i.e.*, nearly £45 an acre. There are forty or fifty applicants for small holdings willing to pay 50s. an acre rental for it. I

ascertained from the Clerk to the County Council that the legal charges and expenses of registering title, &c., are estimated at £100, consequently the County Council are borrowing £4,200 at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, to be repaid by annual instalments of principal and interest over a term of forty-eight years. The annual annuity will be £190. So that it looks as if the Norfolk County Council will be able to repeat the experience of the Holland (Lincs.) County Council.

I do not know that I can usefully extend this paper.—I am addressing those who can draw their own conclusions.

There is a magnificent field for the operations of the Co-operative Societies, in a tract of country extending from Boston to Wisbech—some of the finest land in the country (see Cobbett's "Rural Rides,") and also in some parts of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Take the nineteen agricultural parishes around Spalding, containing 143,577 acres of land, almost all of it eminently adapted for small holdings, and most of it land that from time to time changes hands. The one parish of Holbeach alone contains 21,133 acres, and at the present moment not more than the odd 133 acres are under allotment and small holding cultivation. The labourers in the parish are a sturdy class, ready for small holdings. During the last ten years several farms have been sold in the open market in this parish alone, which are to-day worth £5 to £10 an acre more than was given for them.

To give one illustration of the value of land in this particular district I would refer to the sale by auction in the year 1887 of Lord Saye and Sele's estate. There were 2,871 acres, in 99 lots, and these included 23 farms, ranging from 25 to 230 acres in extent, scattered about the parishes round Spalding. Twenty-nine lots, 850 acres in all, were sold at the public auction at an average of £35. 10s. per acre, and the whole remaining 2,000 acres was disposed of privately in a few weeks for an average price of from £30 to £38 per acre. Whenever any

of this land is to let there are at least twenty applicants for it. A personal friend of mine who bought one of the farms for £33 per acre has refused an offer of £45 for it, and is now letting it at a rental of 45s. per acre. From my own personal knowledge of this estate I venture to say that the greater portion is worth £50 an acre to-day. This gives an illustration of the increasing value of land in this district spread over a period of seventeen years.

I can only say, in conclusion, that if the experience and knowledge I have gained in this movement is of any service to any co-operative society I will gladly, as far as my time permits, render any service in the promotion of what I believe to be a policy fraught with untold blessing to the rural populations, and, indirectly, to the teeming millions of our cities.

R. WINFREY.



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